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ABSTRACT

This presentation deals with the concept of "profession" including the requirement of a code of ethics and the need to enforce it. Teaching as a profession is compared to medicine, law, and the ministry, and consideration is given to the following dilemmas posed in establishing the code and enforcing it: the professional vs. the unprofessional act; impact of and problems created by unionization; declared reasons for the dismissal of tenured persons; and individual style of teaching and administering. (Author)

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Professional Expectations: Implications For Teacher Effectiveness

Joseph A. Browde

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ABSTRACT

This presentation deals with the concept of "profession" including the requirement of a code of ethics and the need to enforce the same. Teaching as a profession is compared to medicine, law, and the ministry, and consideration is given to the following dilemmas posed in establishing the code and enforcing it: 1) The professional vs. the unprofessional act; 2) The impact of and problems created by unionization; 3) The declared reasons for the dismissal of tenured persons; and 4) One's style of teaching and administering.

Professional Expectations: Implications For Teacher Effectiveness

The historical concern for teacher effectiveness has included attention to certain inherent worthy characteristics possessed by the teacher, specific emphases in curricula and methods such as those designated student-centered and experience-centered, and concentration upon the dynamics of interaction, verbal and non-verbal, between teacher and students. The latter has continued to generate study and research with productive consequences.

Concomitantly, interest in the consideration of teaching as a profession has been increasing, particularly the status of the teacher as a professional. Questions pertaining to teacher effectiveness have been associated with regard for the teacher as a professional, suggesting that effectiveness will be enhanced if professional distinction is clearly attributed.

There has been a great deal of defensiveness surrounding teaching as a profession; unfortunately, there has been little delineation and general acceptance of the behaviors expected. If teaching effectiveness is to be encouraged by the acknowledgement of teaching as a profession, then there is an urgent need for establishing a code of professional behavior recognized by all within the profession and a firm determination to enforce the same.

Current literature has been helpful in denoting some directions and trends, but, apparently, we have a long way to go. The Missouri State Teachers Association Code of Professional Ethics (1976, p. 12), for example, represents a statement of beliefs dealing with the student, profession, and community, but there is no indication of the behaviors expected or enforcement of these.

A review of the descriptions of a profession indicate the following:

> The professional participant brings to the organization specialized knowledge or skill typically acquired through years of formal training and apprenticeship.

> He insists on relative freedom from organizational constraints in practicing his speciality; has a strong commitment to the development of his career, which will be within his particular area of expertise but not necessarily within a particular organization; and the professional is careful to exercise his specialty with responsibility, so that standards of performance are set, at least partially, by the professional rather than by the organization for which he works (Greenwood 1969, p. 655).

> A profession requires that its members . . . establish and adhere to a code of ethics regarding membership, conduct, and practice (Richey, 1979, p. 182).

> The profession collectively and . . . individually, possesses a body of knowledge and a repertoire of behaviors and skills (professional culture) needed in the practice of the profession; such knowledge, behavior, and skills normally are not possessed by the nonprofessional . . . . The profession is organized into one or more professional associations which, within broad limits of social accountability, are granted autonomy in control of the actual work of the profession and the conditions which surround it (admission, educational standards of examination and licensing, career line, ethical and performance standards, professional discipline (Howsam, et al 1976, p. 6,7).

Precedents for behavioral expectations have been established in the recognized professions. In medicine, for instance, the Hippocratic Oath briefly spells out guidelines relative to both medical practice and personal character, including confidentiality of information, euthanasia, and abortion. Over the years the American Medical Association has expanded upon the professional expectations.

Specific codes of conduct are itemized for law. Judicial conduct in North Carolina (1973) not only is spelled out for court proceedings, but focuses upon writing, lecturing, teaching, finances, business dealings, and mediation with regulations established for censure, removal, or retirement.

The ministry, also, outlines its professional expectations and the enforcement of them. One denomination (United Methodist Church, 1976) has sets of questions for probationary membership and membership in full connection, duties of pastors, and termination guidelines.

Comparatively, teaching as a profession has aroused enough concern for its status that the National Education Association has formally drawn up a code of ethics that includes a preamble, commitments to the student, public, and profession, and professional employment practices (1971-72, p. 18). The problems that occur

involve securing the allegiance of all engaged in teaching to the Association and the code, as well as its enforcement.

Reaction to teaching as a profession has been summed up by Howsam, et al, who state:

> Actually teaching meets some of the criteria well and falls short on others . . . . Though many teachers are recognized as individually competent and skilled in their performance, the teaching profession is characterized by lack of a common body of knowledge and repetoire of behaviors and skills as "technical" or "professional" . . . . It is clear that teaching presently falls short of meeting the recognized criteria for a mature profession (1976, p. 10, 11).
>
> . . . Teachers may become subject to professional discipline and liable for suit on the grounds of either unethical or incompetent behavior in much the same way as other professions. Teachers and other educators will give evidence in hearings and cases, drawing on the professionally agreed upon knowledge, behavior, and skills of the professional culture (1976, p. 16,17).

Keep in mind that Howsam, et al, proceed no further. They do not make any attempt to categorize the professional behaviors expected.

The efforts on the parts of others to accomplish this, however, has resulted in dilemmas. One involves raising the question as to what constitutes the professional versus the unprofessional act (corresponding to the moral and ethical implications of professional behavior). Difficulties have been created for the medical profession in which the code of Hippocrates or the AMA guidelines reveal no solution. Spencer has noted:

> Widespread familiarity with cardiopulmonary-resuscitation technics and the prompt availability of portable defibrillators and "crash carts" in most modern hospitals have made it possible to attempt resuscitation in virtually all in-hospital deaths. The policy in many hospitals is that a resuscitative effort will be made on all patients in the event of death unless the physician has written a "no-code" order . . . .
>
> The current state of affairs has introduced some new complexities into this decision-making process. The new complexities concern the timing of such decisions and the question of who should be involved in making them. Not only must the physician now consider the question of code or no code virtually at the time of admission to the hospital rather than at the time of crisis, but he must also record it in writing if he arrives at a "no-code" decision. Furthermore, in this litigation-conscious era physicians are looking to the courts and the legal profession for guidance and protection and are also asking families of patients to share the burden of responsibility for such decisions to a degree unthinkable a few years ago . . . .

> As physicians, we have an obligation to keep our priorities straight, to do always what we consider to be in the best interests of our patients and in keeping with our moral and ethical precepts. This task is not always simple or easy, but we nevertheless must have the courage to do it and even to risk censure or litigation, rather than to depend on third parties for guidance or leadership (1979, p. 138-40).

Similar illustrations of this dilemma in the teaching profession have appeared in recent years. Miller points out:

> Despite . . . the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act, . . . many educators yet remain insensitive to the need to return papers to students in a way that will ensure confidentiality of the grades that have been awarded (1978, p. 606).

Again in the area of curriculum evaluation, Green notes:

> The basic ethical question that must be persistently asked about any evaluation program . . . is: Is the process of evaluation judgmental and destructive, or is it constructive and serving the needs of students? . . . The bottom line of ethical evaluation of curricula is whether or not administrators will face up to the failure of a curriculum that they had a hand in selecting and formulating (1978, p. 285-86).

Competency-based teacher education has given evidence of concern for professional acts. Students completing programs often are expected to demonstrate such competencies as fostering mutual respect and dignity among students, reacting rationally to constructive criticism, and using professional restraint in discussing matters of a confidential nature. The negative of these would suggest unprofessional and unethical behavior.

Another dilemma is posed by the impact of and problems created by unionization. The issue here is not whether teachers can strike or not, but whether professionals strike. Can we opt for a mode of labor practice and retain the right of calling ourselves professionals? Because teachers claim the distinction is no guarantee that the recognized professions or the public will accept this. Ironically, there is some evidence that medicine may be moving in the direction of approving strikes, but the past occurrence in Canada involved a hospital situation rather than a professional/client environment and relationship.

Wise, past NEA president, states: "Even more crucial is the implied conflict

between the desire for professional status and union-type activities" (1973, p. 4). She refers to herself as a professional teacher but confesses to being a part of strike rallies, picket lines, and militancy.

Ralston, Chairperson of the NEA Higher Education Council, 1979, unhesitatingly declares: "Although some may not like the term, what we are basically *is* a labor union . . . . Personally, I think we're a good one" (1979, p. 3).

The conflicts among NEA, AFT, and AACTE have been obvious. Relative to professional expectations there has been no agreement on behaviors, the enforcement of a code, and the nature of our professional commitments, although some of our responsibility to students has been observed. The possibility of ATE serving as a common base for the profession, its nature, commitments, ethics, and discipline looms not only a reality, but also as the moment of opportunity inasmuch as ATE, in the words of President James F. Collins, "has no political axe to grind" (stated at the North Carolina ATE Annual Conference, May, 1979).

A third dilemma centers around the declared reasons for dismissing tenured persons. Incompetency has been acknowledged as one cause for dismissal, but difficulties of accomplishing removal for this are legion. Contrastingly, law gives evidence of not hesitating to disbar a member. The author recalls serving on jury duty a year ago when a case was delayed a few days due to the presiding judge having to participate in disbarment proceedings. Again, the ministry will defrock its members for personal practice, as well as theological, reasons.

The teaching profession, however, is not alone with this problem. There are numerous instances of medicine reacting slowly to incompetency among its members. Kirkpatrick, reporting for The Associated Press, has written:

> Only a few of the nation's more than 300,000 doctors are willing to testify against one of their own, trial lawyers complain . . . . In a number of medical specialties--notably neurology, orthopedics, and cardiology--it is nearly impossible to find a doctor willing to accuse another of mistakes, lapses or incompetence . . . (1979, p. 16).

Other reasons for dismissing tenured persons are enigmatic. Determining what

constitutes moral terpitude becomes extremely frustrating. Economic necessity has been utilized, but at times for reasons that raise questions of integrity. Legal battles have ensued leaving the courts to ferret out the underlying reasons for dismissal.

A fourth dilemma pertains to one's style of teaching and administrating. The NAESP Code of Ethics for school administrators stresses conformity to an ethical code and specifics are delineated (Pharis, 1976). Emphases include the well-being of students, responsibility with honesty, civil and human rights protection, etc. Unfortunately, no direction is provided for acting upon violations of this code.

The dilemma is magnified by supporting fundamental democratic convictions and, at the same time, comparing democratic with authoritarian styles of teaching and administrating. Is the latter, for example, an infringement upon human rights and a negation of our professed way of life, a denial of one's dignity, respect, etc., and, if so, a breach of faith with our ethical commitment? Howsam, et al, support "cultivating personal commitments to the social purposes for which education in a democracy exists" (1976, p. 42). How can this be fulfilled in an authoritarian climate?

In conclusion, it would appear that those of us engaged in teaching need to take seriously our obligation to a "code of ethics" and its legitimate enforcement if we intend to succeed in our quest for professional status and recognition, as well as contribute to our effectiveness. There is no doubt that professionalism as a particular set of expected behaviors will be organized around 1) a primary concern for the profession in which personal relationships are kept relatively separate from professional ones; 2) a renewed emphasis upon rationality in decision-making and practice; 3) an attitude that exemplifies the importance of seeking for excellence and the truth; and 4) a commitment to human rights, respect, dignity, that is representative of our democratic way of life. Furthermore, it seems that ATE is now in the best position to accomplish this objective.

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